THE DESERTER

RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

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WITHDRAWN

THE DESERTER

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BY

RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

JOHN T. McCUTCHEON

REDWOOD LIBRARY,
NEWPORT, R. I.

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INTRODUCTION

When Mr. Davis wrote the story of "The Deserter," he could not possibly have foreseen that it was to be his last story—the last of those short stories which gave him such eminence as a short-story writer.

He apparently was as rugged and as vigorous as ever.

And yet, had he sat down to write a story which he knew was to be his last, I do not think he could have written one more fittingly designed to be the capstone of his literary monument. The theme is one in which he has unconsciously mirrored his own ideals of honorable obligation, as well as one which presents a wholesome lesson to young soldiers who have taken an oath to do faithful service to a nation.

It is a story with a moral so subtly expressed that every soldier or sailor who reads it will think seriously of it if the temptation to such disloyalty should enter his mind. This story of the young man who tried to desert at Salonika may well have a heartening influence upon all men in uniforms who waver in the path of duty—especially in these days of vast military operations when a whole world is in arms. It belongs in patriotic literature by the side of Edward Everett Hale's "The Man Without a Country." The motif is the same—that of obligation and service and loyalty to a pledge.

In "The Deserter" Mr. Davis does not reveal the young soldier's name, for obvious reasons, and the name of the hotel and ship in Salonika are likewise disguised. It is part of the art of the skilful story-writer to dress his narrative in such a way as to eliminate those matter-of-fact details which would be

emphasized by one writing the story as a matter of news. For instance, the Hotel Hermes in Mr. Davis's story is the Olympos Palace Hotel, and the *Adriaticus* is the Greek steamer *Helleni.* The name of the young soldier is given as "Hamlin," and under this literary "camouflage," to borrow a word born of the war, the story may be read without the thought that a certain definite young man will be humiliated by seeing his own name revealed as that of a potential deserter.

But the essentials of the story are all true, and its value as a lasting influence for good is in no way impaired by the necessary fictions as to places and identities.

It was my privilege to see the dramatic incidents of the story of "The Deserter" as they unfolded during the time included in Mr. Davis's story. The setting was in the huge room—chamber, living-room, workroom, club-

room, and sometimes dining-room that we occupied in the Olympos Palace Hotel in Salonika. William G. Shepherd, of the United Press, James H. Hare, the veteran war photographer, and I were the original occupants of this room, which owed its vast dimensions to the fact that it formerly had been the dining-room of the hotel, later the headquarters of the Austrian Club, and finally, under the stressful conditions of an overcrowded city, a bedroom. Mr. Davis joined us here in November of 1915, and for some days shared the room until he could secure another in the same hotel.

The city was seething with huge activities. We lived from day to day, not knowing what moment some disaster might result as a consequence of an incongruous military and political situation, in which German and Austrian consular officials walked the streets side by side with French and British

officers. Men who had lived through many strange situations declared that this motley of tongues and nationalities and conflicting interests to be found in Salonika during those last weeks of 1915 was without a parallel in their experiences.

Into this atmosphere occasionally came the little human dramas that were a welcome novelty beside the big drama that dominated the picture, and it was thus that the drama of the young soldier who wished to desert came into our lives as a gripping, human document.

To Mr. Davis the drama was more than a "news" story; it was something big and fundamental, involving a young man's whole future, and as such it revealed to his quick instinct for dramatic situations the theme for a big story.

No sooner had "Hamlin" left our room, reclad in his dirty uniform and

headed for certain punishment back at his camp, than Mr. Davis proclaimed his intention to write the story.

"The best war story I ever knew!" he exclaimed.

Of course the young soldier did not see it as a drama in real life, and he certainly did not comprehend that he might be playing a part in what would be a tragedy in his own life. To him the incident had no dramatic possibilities. He was merely a young man who had been racked by exposure and suffering to a point where he longed to escape a continuance of such hardship, and the easiest way out of it seemed by way of deserting.

He was "fed up" on discomfort and dirt and cold, and harassed by the effects of an ill-healed wound received in Flanders some months before, and he wanted to go home.

The story, as Mr. Davis tells it in the following pages, is complete as it

stands. So far as he knew up to the time of his death, there was no sequel. He died thinking of "Hamlin" as a potential deserter who had been shamed out of his purpose to desert and who had left, ungrateful and bitter with resentment at his fellow Americans, who had persuaded him to go back to camp, "take his medicine," and "see it through."

The Hotel "Hermes" is probably no more. Only a few days ago the news came that all of the water-front of Salonika, a district stretching in splendid array from the "White Tower" to the Customs House, had been wiped out by a tremendous fire. It was in this district that most of the finest buildings, including the Olympos Palace Hotel—the Hotel Hermes of Mr. Davis's story—were located, and there is little likelihood that any of this part of the city escaped. The magnitude of the fire is indicated by the estimated loss, which

is $100,000,000, with about $26,000,000 insurance.

The government has authorized the construction of barracks outside the burned zone, but has decided not to permit repairs or temporary construction within that area until plans for rebuilding the city are complete.

Thus the setting of the story of "The Deserter" is gone, the author is gone, and who can tell at this moment whether "Hamlin," fighting in the trenches on the British front in France, is not also gone.

I hope it may not affect the interest or the moral of the story if I give the sequel. I know that Mr. Davis would have been glad to hear what became of the young man who left our room with an angry word of resentment against us. I hope, too, that the reader will feel a natural interest in knowing how he fared, and what punishment he received for having overstayed his leave, and for

shaving his mustache as part of his plan to escape detection, both of which infractions made him subject to punishment.

One day about three weeks after Davis had left Salonika homeward bound, a soldier brought us a note from "Hamlin." He was on a Red Cross lighter down at the pier, and we at once went down to see him. He was lying on a stretcher among scores of men. His face was thin and pale, and in answer to our eager questions he told how he had fared when he returned to camp.

"Oh, they gave it to me good," he said. "But they still think I got drunk. They took away my stripes and made me a private. But I was sick the night I got back to camp and I've been laid up ever since. They say there is something the matter with my intestines and they're going to cut me open again. Gee, but the captain was surprised! He

said he had always counted on me as a teetotaller and that he was grieved and disappointed in me. And just think, I've never taken a drink in my life!"

We said good-by, and this time it was a friendly good-by. That night he left on a hospital ship for Alexandria.

Once more the course of young Mr. "Hamlin's" life was swallowed up in the vast oblivion of army life, and we heard no more of him until, one day in London, three months later, Shepherd felt an arm thrown about his shoulder and turned to find the healthy and cheerful face of "Hamlin."

A few minutes later, at a luncheon-table, Shepherd heard his story.

After leaving Alexandria he was sent to a hospital in Manchester. On the day of his discharge he was asked to report to a certain major, who informed him that the government had conferred upon him the D. C. M.—the medal for Distinguished Conduct in the field—in

recognition of his service in recovering a wounded man from No Man's land in Flanders ten months before. The following day, before a file of soldiers drawn up on the parade-ground, the honor was officially conferred and a little ribbon was pinned upon his coat to testify to the appreciative, though somewhat tardy, gratitude of the government.

"Hamlin" pointed to the little ribbon on his lapel and proudly drew from his pocket an official paper in which his heroic achievement was duly recited.

He had not heard of Davis's death, and was deeply touched when Mr. Shepherd told him of it. At once he expressed his endless gratitude to Davis and the rest of us for what we had done for him in Salonika.

In a few days he was to return to France with his regiment. What has happened to him since then I have no means of knowing. His movements are

again wrapped in that dense fog which veils the soldier's life to all the outside world except those to whom he writes.

In view of what we now know of Hamlin's physical condition at the time his mind was obsessed with the idea of deserting, both Mr. Shepherd and I are glad to believe that his decision to desert was the consequence of physical rather than mental or moral weakness, for his stamina was at its lowest ebb because of a weakened body.

JOHN T. MCCUTCHEON.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS,
September 15, 1917.

THE DESERTER

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IN Salonika, the American consul, the Standard Oil man, and the war correspondents formed the American colony. The correspondents were waiting to go to the front. Incidentally, as we waited, the front was coming rapidly toward us. There was "Uncle" Jim, the veteran of many wars, and of all the correspondents, in experience the oldest and in spirit the youngest, and there was the Kid, and the Artist. The Kid jeered at us, and proudly described himself as the only Boy Reporter who jumped from a City Hall assignment to

cover a European War. "I don't know strategy," he would boast; "neither does the Man at Home. He wants 'human interest' stuff, and I give him what he wants. I write exclusively for the subway guard and the farmers in the wheat belt. When you fellows write about the 'Situation,' they don't understand it. Neither do you. Neither does Venizelos or the King. I don't understand it myself. So, I write my people heart-to-heart talks about refugees and wounded, and what kind of ploughs the Servian peasants use, and that St. Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians from the same hotel where I write mine; and I tell 'em to pronounce Salonika 'eeka,' and *not* put the accent on the 'on.' This morning at the

refugee camp I found all the little Servians of the Frothingham unit in American Boy Scout uniforms. That's my meat. That's 'home week' stuff. You fellows write for the editorial page; and nobody reads it. I write for the man that turns first to Mutt and Jeff, and then looks to see where they are running the new Charlie Chaplin release. When that man has to choose between 'our military correspondent' and the City Hall Reporter, he chooses me!"

The third man was John, "Our Special Artist." John could write a news story, too, but it was the cartoons that had made him famous. They were not comic page, but front page cartoons, and before making up their minds what they thought,

people waited to see what their Artist thought. So, it was fortunate his thoughts were as brave and clean as they were clever. He was the original Little Brother to the Poor. He was always giving away money. When we caught him, he would prevaricate. He would say the man was a college chum, that he had borrowed the money from him, and that this was the first chance he had had to pay it back. The Kid suggested it was strange that so many of his college chums should at the same moment turn up, dead broke, in Salonika, and that half of them should be women.

John smiled disarmingly. "It was a large college," he explained, "and coeducational." There were other Americans; Red Cross doc-

tors and nurses just escaped through the snow from the Bulgars, and hyphenated Americans who said they had taken out their first papers. They thought hyphenated citizens were so popular with us, that we would pay their passage to New York. In Salonika they were transients. They had no local standing. They had no local lying-down place, either, or place to eat, or to wash, although they did not look as though that worried them, or place to change their clothes. Or clothes to change. It was because we had clothes to change, and a hotel bedroom, instead of a bench in a café, that we were ranked as residents and from the Greek police held a "permission to sojourn." Our American colony was a very close corporation. We

were only six Americans against 300,000 British, French, Greek, and Servian soldiers, and 120,000 civilian Turks, Spanish Jews, Armenians, Persians, Egyptians, Albanians, and Arabs, and some twenty more other races that are not listed. We had arrived in Salonika before the rush, and at the Hotel Hermes on the water-front had secured a vast room. The edge of the stone quay was not forty feet from us, the only landing steps directly opposite our balcony. Everybody who arrived on the Greek passenger boats from Naples or the Piræus, or who had shore leave from a man-of-war, transport, or hospital ship, was raked by our cameras. There were four windows —one for each of us and his work-table. It was not easy to work.

What was the use? The pictures and stories outside the windows fascinated us, but when we sketched them or wrote about them, they only proved us inadequate. All day long the pinnaces, cutters, gigs, steam launches shoved and bumped against the stone steps, marines came ashore for the mail, stewards for fruit and fish, Red Cross nurses to shop, tiny midshipmen to visit the movies, and the sailors and officers of the Russian, French, British, Italian, and Greek war-ships to stretch their legs in the park of the Tour Blanche, or to cramp them under a café table. Sometimes the ambulances blocked the quay and the wounded and frost-bitten were lifted into the motor-boats, and sometimes a squad of marines lined the landing stage, and

as a coffin under a French or English flag was borne up the stone steps stood at salute. So crowded was the harbor that the oars of the boatmen interlocked.

Close to the stone quay, stretched along the three-mile circle, were the fishing smacks, beyond them, so near that the anchor chains fouled, were the passenger ships with gigantic Greek flags painted on their sides, and beyond them transports from Marseilles, Malta, and Suvla Bay, black colliers, white hospital ships, burning green electric lights, red-bellied tramps and freighters, and, hemming them in, the grim, mouse-colored destroyers, submarines, cruisers, dreadnaughts. At times, like a wall, the cold fog rose between us and the harbor, and again the cur-

tain would suddenly be ripped asunder, and the sun would flash on the brass work of the fleet, on the white wings of the aeroplanes, on the snow-draped shoulders of Mount Olympus. We often speculated as to how in the early days the gods and goddesses, dressed as they were, or as they were not, survived the snows of Mount Olympus. Or was it only their resort for the summer?

It got about that we had a vast room to ourselves, where one might obtain a drink, or a sofa for the night, or even money to cable for money. So, we had many strange visitors, some half starved, half frozen, with terrible tales of the Albanian trail, of the Austrian prisoners fallen by the wayside, of the mountain passes heaped with dead, of the doctors and

nurses wading waist-high in snow-drifts and for food killing the ponies. Some of our visitors wanted to get their names in the American papers so that the folks at home would know they were still alive, others wanted us to keep their names out of the papers, hoping the police would think them dead; another, convinced it was of pressing news value, desired us to advertise the fact that he had invented a poisonous gas for use in the trenches. With difficulty we prevented him from casting it adrift in our room. Or, he had for sale a second-hand motor-cycle, or he would accept a position as barkeeper, or for five francs would sell a state secret that, once made public, in a month would end the war. It seemed cheap at the price.

Each of us had his "scouts" to bring him the bazaar rumor, the Turkish bath rumor, the café rumor. Some of our scouts journeyed as far afield as Monastir and Doiran, returning to drip snow on the floor, and to tell us tales, one-half of which we refused to believe, and the other half the censor refused to pass. With each other's visitors it was etiquette not to interfere. It would have been like tapping a private wire. When we found John sketching a giant stranger in a cap and coat of wolf skin we did not seek to know if he were an Albanian brigand, or a Servian prince *incognito*, and when a dark Levantine sat close to the Kid, whispering, and the Kid banged on his typewriter, we did not listen.

So, when I came in one afternoon and found a strange American youth writing at John's table, and no one introduced us, I took it for granted he had sold the Artist an "exclusive" story, and asked no questions. But I could not help hearing what they said. Even though I tried to drown their voices by beating on the Kid's typewriter. I was taking my third lesson, and I had printed, "I Amm 5w writjng This, 5wjth my own lilly w?ite handS," when I heard the Kid saying:

"You can beat the game this way. Let John buy you a ticket to the Piræus. If you go from one Greek port to another you don't need a visé. But, if you book from here to Italy, you must get a permit from the Italian consul, and our

consul, and the police. The plot is to get out of the war zone, isn't it? Well, then, my dope is to get out quick, and map the rest of your trip when you're safe in Athens."

It was no business of mine, but I had to look up. The stranger was now pacing the floor. I noticed that while his face was almost black with tan, his upper lip was quite white. I noticed also that he had his hands in the pockets of one of John's blue serge suits, and that the pink silk shirt he wore was one that once had belonged to the Kid. Except for the pink shirt, in the appearance of the young man there was nothing unusual. He was of a familiar type. He looked like a young business man from our Middle West, matter-of-fact and unimaginative, but capa-

ble and self-reliant. If he had had a fountain pen in his upper waistcoat pocket, I would have guessed he was an insurance agent, or the publicity man for a new automobile. John picked up his hat, and said, "That's good advice. Give me your steamer ticket, Fred, and I'll have them change it." He went out; but he did not ask Fred to go with him.

Uncle Jim rose, and murmured something about the Café Roma, and tea. But neither did he invite Fred to go with him. Instead, he told him to make himself at home, and if he wanted anything the waiter would bring it from the café downstairs. Then the Kid, as though he also was uncomfortable at being left alone with us, hurried to the

door. "Going to get you a suit-case," he explained. "Back in five minutes."

The stranger made no answer. Probably he did not hear him. Not a hundred feet from our windows three Greek steamers were huddled together, and the eyes of the American were fixed on them. The one for which John had gone to buy him a new ticket lay nearest. She was to sail in two hours. Impatiently, in short quick steps, the stranger paced the length of the room, but when he turned and so could see the harbor, he walked slowly, devouring it with his eyes. For some time, in silence, he repeated this manœuvre; and then the complaints of the typewriter disturbed him. He halted and ob-

served my struggles. Under his scornful eye, in my embarrassment I frequently hit the right letter. "You a newspaper man, too?" he asked. I boasted I was, but begged not to be judged by my typewriting.

"I got some great stories to write when I get back to God's country," he announced. "I was a reporter for two years in Kansas City before the war, and now I'm going back to lecture and write. I got enough material to keep me at work for five years. All kinds of stuff—specials, fiction stories, personal experiences, maybe a novel."

I regarded him with envy. For the correspondents in the greatest of all wars the pickings had been meagre. "You are to be congratulated," I said. He brushed aside

my congratulations. "For what?" he demanded. "I didn't go after the stories; they came to me. The things I saw I had to see. Couldn't get away from them. I've been with the British, serving in the R. A. M. C. Been hospital steward, stretcher bearer, ambulance driver. I've been sixteen months at the front, and all the time on the firing-line. I was in the retreat from Mons, with French on the Marne, at Ypres, all through the winter fighting along the Canal, on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and, just lately, in Servia. I've seen more of this war than any soldier. Because, sometimes, they give the soldier a rest; they never give the medical corps a rest. The only rest I got was when I was wounded."

He seemed no worse for his wounds, so again I tendered congratulations. This time he accepted them. The recollection of the things he had seen, things incredible, terrible, unique in human experience, had stirred him. He talked on, not boastfully, but in a tone, rather, of awe and disbelief, as though assuring himself that it was really he to whom such things had happened.

"I don't believe there's any kind of fighting I haven't seen," he declared; "hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets, grenades, gun butts. I've seen 'em on their knees in the mud choking each other, beating each other with their bare fists. I've seen every kind of airship, bomb, shell, poison gas, every kind of wound. Seen whole villages

turned into a brickyard in twenty minutes; in Servia seen bodies of women frozen to death, bodies of babies starved to death, seen men in Belgium swinging from trees; along the Yzer for three months I saw the bodies of men I'd known sticking out of the mud, or hung up on the barb wire, with the crows picking them.

"I've seen some of the nerviest stunts that ever were pulled off in history. I've seen *real* heroes. Time and time again I've seen a man throw away his life for his officer, or for a chap he didn't know, just as though it was a cigarette butt. I've seen the women nurses of our corps steer a car into a village and yank out a wounded man while shells were breaking under the wheels

and the houses were pitching into the streets." He stopped and laughed consciously.

"Understand," he warned me, "I'm not talking about myself, only of things I've seen. The things I'm going to put in my book. It ought to be a pretty good book—what?"

My envy had been washed clean in admiration.

"It will make a wonderful book," I agreed. "Are you going to syndicate it first?"

Young Mr. Hamlin frowned importantly.

"I was thinking," he said, "of asking John for letters to the magazine editors. So, they'll know I'm not faking, that I've really been through it all. Letters from John would help a lot." Then he asked

anxiously: "They would, wouldn't they?"

I reassured him. Remembering the Kid's gibes at John and his numerous dependents, I said: "You another college chum of John's?" The young man answered my question quite seriously. "No," he said; "John graduated before I entered; but we belong to the same fraternity. It was the luckiest chance in the world my finding him here. There was a month-old copy of the *Balkan News* blowing around camp, and his name was in the list of arrivals. The moment I found he was in Salonika, I asked for twelve hours' leave, and came down in an ambulance. I made straight for John; gave him the grip, and put it up to him to help me."

"I don't understand," I said. "I thought you were sailing on the *Adriaticus?*"

The young man was again pacing the floor. He halted and faced the harbor.

"You bet I'm sailing on the *Adriaticus,*" he said. He looked out at that vessel, at the Blue Peter flying from her foremast, and grinned. "In just two hours!"

It was stupid of me, but I still was unenlightened. "But your twelve hours' leave?" I asked.

The young man laughed. "They can take my twelve hours' leave," he said deliberately, "and feed it to the chickens. I'm beating it."

"What d'you mean, you're beating it?"

"What do you suppose I mean?"

he demanded. "What do you suppose I'm doing out of uniform, what do you suppose I'm lying low in the room for? So's I won't catch cold?"

"If you're leaving the army without a discharge, and without permission," I said, "I suppose you know it's desertion."

Mr. Hamlin laughed easily. "It's not *my* army," he said. "I'm an American."

"It's your desertion," I suggested.

The door opened and closed noiselessly, and Billy, entering, placed a new travelling bag on the floor. He must have heard my last words, for he looked inquiringly at each of us. But he did not speak and, walking to the window, stood with his hands in his pockets, staring out at the

harbor. His presence seemed to encourage the young man. "Who knows I'm deserting?" he demanded. "No one's ever seen me in Salonika before, and in these 'cits' I can get on board all right. And then they can't touch me. What do the folks at home care *how* I left the British army? They'll be so darned glad to get me back alive that they won't ask if I walked out or was kicked out. I should worry!"

"It's none of my business," I began, but I was interrupted. In his restless pacings the young man turned quickly.

"As you say," he remarked icily, "it *is* none of your business. It's none of your business whether I get shot as a deserter, or go home, or——"

"You can go to the devil for all I care," I assured him. "I wasn't considering you at all. I was only sorry that I'll never be able to read your book."

For a moment Mr. Hamlin remained silent, then he burst forth with a jeer.

"No British firing squad," he boasted, "will ever stand *me* up."

"Maybe not," I agreed, "but you will never write that book."

Again there was silence, and this time it was broken by the Kid. He turned from the window and looked toward Hamlin. "That's right!" he said.

He sat down on the edge of the table, and at the deserter pointed his forefinger.

"Son," he said, "this war is some

war. It's the biggest war in history, and folks will be talking about nothing else for the next ninety years; folks that never were nearer it than Bay City, Mich. But you won't talk about it. And you've been all through it. You've been to hell and back again. Compared with what you know about hell, Dante is in the same class with Dr. Cook. But you won't be able to talk about this war, or lecture, or write a book about it."

"I won't?" demanded Hamlin. "And why won't I?"

"Because of what you're doing now," said Billy. "Because you're queering yourself. Now, you've got everything." The Kid was very much in earnest. His tone was intimate, kind, and friendly. "You've

seen everything, done everything. We'd give our eye-teeth to see what you've seen, and to write the things you can write. You've got a record now that'll last you until you're dead, and your grandchildren are dead—and then some. When you talk the table will have to sit up and listen. You can say 'I was there.' 'I was in it.' 'I saw.' 'I know.' When this war is over you'll have everything out of it that's worth getting—all the experiences, all the inside knowledge, all the 'nosebag' news; you'll have wounds, honors, medals, money, reputation. And you're throwing all that away!"

Mr. Hamlin interrupted savagely.

"To hell with their medals," he said. "They can take their medals and hang 'em on Christmas trees.

I don't owe the British army anything. It owes me. I've done *my* bit. I've earned what I've got, and there's no one can take it away from me."

"*You* can," said the Kid. Before Hamlin could reply the door opened and John came in, followed by Uncle Jim. The older man was looking very grave, and John very unhappy. Hamlin turned quickly to John.

"I thought these men were friends of yours," he began, "and Americans. They're fine Americans. They're as full of human kindness and red blood as a kippered herring!"

John looked inquiringly at the Kid.

"He wants to hang himself," ex-

plained Billy, "and because we tried to cut him down, he's sore."

"They talked to me," protested Hamlin, "as though I was a yellow dog. As though I was a quitter. I'm no quitter! But, if I'm ready to quit, who's got a better right? I'm not an Englishman, but there are several million Englishmen haven't done as much for England in this war as I have. What do you fellows know about it? You *write* about it, about the 'brave lads in the trenches'; but what do you know about the trenches? What you've seen from automobiles. That's all. That's where *you* get off! I've *lived* in the trenches for fifteen months, froze in 'em, starved in 'em, risked my life in 'em, and I've saved other lives, too, by haul-

ing men out of the trenches. And that's no airy persiflage, either!"

He ran to the wardrobe where John's clothes hung, and from the bottom of it dragged a khaki uniform. It was still so caked with mud and snow that when he flung it on the floor it splashed like a wet bathing suit. "How would you like to wear one of those?" he demanded. "Stinking with lice and sweat and blood; the blood of other men, the men you've helped off the field, and your own blood."

As though committing hara-kiri, he slashed his hand across his stomach, and then drew it up from his waist to his chin. "I'm scraped with shrapnel from there to there," said Mr. Hamlin. "And another time I got a ball in the shoulder.

That would have been a 'blighty' for a fighting man—they're always giving *them* leave—but all I got was six weeks at Havre in hospital. Then it was the Dardanelles, and sunstroke and sand; sleeping in sand, eating sand, sand in your boots, sand in your teeth; hiding in holes in the sand like a dirty prairie dog. And then, 'Off to Servia!' And the next act opens in the snow and the mud! Cold? God, how cold it was! And most of us in sun helmets."

As though the cold still gnawed at his bones, he shivered.

"It isn't the danger," he protested. "It isn't *that* I'm getting away from. To hell with the danger! It's just the plain discomfort of it! It's the never being your own mas-

ter, never being clean, never being warm." Again he shivered and rubbed one hand against the other. "There were no bridges over the streams," he went on, "and we had to break the ice and wade in, and then sleep in the open with the khaki frozen to us. There was no firewood; not enough to warm a pot of tea. There were no wounded; all our casualties were frost bite and pneumonia. When we take them out of the blankets their toes fall off. We've been in camp for a month now near Doiran, and it's worse there than on the march. It's a frozen swamp. You can't sleep for the cold; can't eat; the only ration we get is bully beef, and our insides are frozen so damn tight we can't digest it. The cold gets into your

blood, gets into your brains. It won't let you think; or else, you think crazy things. It makes you afraid." He shook himself like a man coming out of a bad dream.

"So, I'm through," he said. In turn he scowled at each of us, as though defying us to contradict him. "That's why I'm quitting," he added. "Because I've done my bit. Because I'm damn well fed up on it." He kicked viciously at the water-logged uniform on the floor. "Any one who wants my job can have it!" He walked to the window, turned his back on us, and fixed his eyes hungrily on the *Adriaticus*. There was a long pause. For guidance we looked at John, but he was staring down at the desk

blotter, scratching on it marks that he did not see.

Finally, where angels feared to tread, the Kid rushed in. "That's certainly a hard luck story," he said; "but," he added cheerfully, "it's nothing to the hard luck you'll strike when you can't tell why you left the army." Hamlin turned with an exclamation, but Billy held up his hand. "Now wait," he begged, "we haven't time to get mussy. At six o'clock your leave is up, and the troop train starts back to camp, and——"

Mr. Hamlin interrupted sharply. "And the *Adriaticus* starts at five."

Billy did not heed him. "You've got two hours to change your mind," he said. "That's better than being

sorry you didn't the rest of your life."

Mr. Hamlin threw back his head and laughed. It was a most unpleasant laugh. "You're a fine body of men," he jeered. "America must be proud of you!"

"If we *weren't* Americans," explained Billy patiently, "we wouldn't give a damn whether you deserted or not. You're drowning and you don't know it, and we're throwing you a rope. Try to see it that way. We'll cut out the fact that you took an oath, and that you're breaking it. That's up to you. We'll get down to results. When you reach home, if you can't tell why you left the army, the folks will darned soon guess. And that will queer everything you've done. When you come

to sell your stuff, it will queer you with the editors, queer you with the publishers. If they know you broke your word to the British army, how can they know you're keeping faith with them? How can they believe anything you tell them? Every 'story' you write, every statement of yours will make a noise like a fake. You won't come into court with clean hands. You'll be licked before you start.

"Of course, you're for the Allies. Well, all the Germans at home will fear that; and when you want to lecture on your 'Fifteen Months at the British Front,' they'll look up your record; and what will they do to you? This is what they'll do to you. When you've shown 'em your moving pictures and say, 'Does any

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gentleman in the audience want to ask a question?' a German agent will get up and say, 'Yes, I want to ask a question. Is it true that you deserted from the British army, and that if you return to it, they will shoot you?'"

I was scared. I expected the lean and muscular Mr. Hamlin to fall on Billy, and fling him where he had flung the soggy uniform. But instead he remained motionless, his arms pressed across his chest. His eyes, filled with anger and distress, returned to the *Adriaticus*.

"I'm sorry," muttered the Kid.

John rose and motioned to the door, and guiltily and only too gladly we escaped. John followed us into the hall. "Let *me* talk to him," he whispered. "The boat

sails in an hour. Please don't come back until she's gone."

We went to the moving picture palace next door, but I doubt if the thoughts of any of us were on the pictures. For after an hour, when from across the quay there came the long-drawn warning of a steamer's whistle, we nudged each other and rose and went out.

Not a hundred yards from us the propeller blades of the *Adriaticus* were slowly churning, and the rowboats were falling away from her sides.

"Good-by, Mr. Hamlin," called Billy. "You had everything and you chucked it away. I can spell your finish. It's 'check' for *yours*."

But when we entered our room, in the centre of it, under the bunch of

electric lights, stood the deserter. He wore the water-logged uniform. The sun helmet was on his head.

"Good man!" shouted Billy.

He advanced, eagerly holding out his hand.

Mr. Hamlin brushed past him. At the door he turned and glared at us, even at John. He was not a good loser. "I hope you're satisfied," he snarled. He pointed at the four beds in a row. I felt guiltily conscious of them. At the moment they appeared so unnecessarily clean and warm and soft. The silk coverlets at the foot of each struck me as being disgracefully effeminate. They made me ashamed.

"I hope," said Mr. Hamlin, speaking slowly and picking his words,

"when you turn into those beds to-night you'll think of me in the mud. I hope when you're having your five-course dinner and your champagne you'll remember my bully beef. I hope when a shell or Mr. Pneumonia gets me, you'll write a nice little sob story about the 'brave lads in the trenches.'"

He looked at us, standing like schoolboys, sheepish, embarrassed, and silent, and then threw open the door. "I hope," he added, "you all choke!"

With an unconvincing imitation of the college chum manner, John cleared his throat and said: "Don't forget, Fred, if there's anything I can do——"

Hamlin stood in the doorway smiling at us.

"There's something you can all do," he said.

"Yes?" asked John heartily.

"You can all go to hell!" said Mr. Hamlin.

We heard the door slam, and his hobnailed boots pounding down the stairs. No one spoke. Instead, in unhappy silence, we stood staring at the floor. Where the uniform had lain was a pool of mud and melted snow and the darker stains of stale blood.

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